THE FAMILY STORY

IN THE CLUTCHES OF A GRIFFIN.

IT was a real relief, when papa's new doctor was gruff and terrifying, to say "bear" all to myself. But, perhaps, I diverted my attention too much from what he was telling me by this device or he scared me into temporary idiocy by his grim demeanor. At any rate, I was conscious that as a nurse I had cut a poor figure.

It seemed a special pity that poor papa should have had that illness just then, when mamma and Isabel were in Baltimore. Mamma had gone there to be under the care of Dr. Baker, and she could not come home, and Isabel could not leave her. If we had only had our good old doctor it would have been better, but he was in Europe, and papa had called in this Dr. Griffin, who, people seemed to think, was something wonderful. It was said that his practice was really something phenomenal for so young a man (he was verging on 60; I am sure that is not so very young for any amount of practice), and I suppose he had to economize his forces, but it made him dreadfully disagreeable.

I was sitting by papa's bed when he came in that first day. Some people made such a hero of him that I felt a little curious to see him, anxious and troubled as I was, and I smiled at him as nicely as I could as papa said, "My daughter, doctor"—though he was little less than appalling; extraordinarily tall and gaunt and awkward, with a rugged, serious face and a shock of tawny hair like a lion's mane.

I was about to go, but as he did not glance in my direction he was probably not aware of my intention. He slightly inclined his head and said: "Miss Macon will please go out." Which Miss Macon did with all due celerity.

That was but the beginning of a series of shrinkages that I underwent during this illness of papa's. I am only 5 feet 4 to start with, but every interview with the doctor made me feel a foot or two shorter.

When I looked out of the window one day and actually saw mamma and Isabel getting out of a carriage at the door it was as if a ton weight had been lifted from me. The doctor was with papa (who, however, was almost well), and I was in my own room keeping out of his way. I dashed downstairs like a mad thing and hung my foot somehow or caught my dress on a loose screw (I have never known which), and fell almost from the top of the flight to the bottom. The doctor rushed out of papa's room and was at the foot of the stairs almost as soon as I was. Mamma and Isabel appeared frantically from the opposite direction, papa calling from upstairs all the time to know what it all meant. I was so ashamed of having caused the commotion that I tried to get up hastily and close the incident.

"Oh, it's nothing. I just slipped," I began, struggling to my feet—and then a great, palpitating darkness settled over all. I revived to find myself, as it were, "in the clutches of a griffin." (I had long applied his name to him in a distinctly opprobrious sense.)

"What do you mean by tearing about the house in that fashion?" he demanded, stopping at the door as he was leaving.

But somehow I was not so afraid of him now, and for reply I only laughed feebly and inanely from my station on the sofa. It was well that my terror of him had lessened, for that miserable sprained ankle required his attention more or less throughout that winter.

A strange thing happened soon after mamma and Isabel came home. Isabel is very pretty and very bright. We were sitting together after tea when the bell rang, and who should be ushered in but Dr. Griffin. And with his hair cut—which was not at all an improvement—though I had thought that any change would be. It was so wonderful to see him sitting there laughing and talking, "like folks," as Mammy Judy used to say, that I could not do anything but stare at him. And when Fred Carey came in I was positively provoked. But then I never saw Fred quite so stupid and uninteresting.

Not very long after that another remarkable thing happened. The first wonderful thing, by the way, began to happen pretty frequently after a while. I think I have a little knack of rhyming, and one day a magazine—a real magazine—took one of my pieces. Such a thing had never happened before and has never happened since. It was a sentimental little effusion, which was not about anything or anybody in particular, but it seemed to me to be pretty, and it sounded as if it meant a good deal.

I was standing on the porch when I opened the letter which the postman had just handed to me. I remember it was a beautiful spring morning, when my cup of happiness was running over anyway, and this last drop was almost too much. I was about to fly into the house, as fast as my disabled ankle would allow, when I heard the click of the gate. I waved my letter to Dr. Griffin as he came up the walk, and he smiled at my absurdly radiant face. It was almost worth while to be so grim looking, to be so transformed by a smile, I thought to myself. I did not wait for greetings or questions.

"I have got a piece accepted by the —— magazine!" I said, eagerly.

"Ah, that's good!" he replied. "And what are you scribbling about?"

"Oh, it's just lovely!" I said. "Don't you want me to say it to you?"

"Go ahead, and don't jumble it," he replied, dropping down upon one of the seats on the porch.

I clasped my hands behind me and rattled off my piece, flushing a little as I did it from suppressed laughter at my own audacity. And then I looked at him for applause. There was a blank silence, and my eyes sank and cheeks grew hot with mortification.

"Humph!" he said at last, getting up from his seat. "Well, how is that ankle of yours?"

It seemed my fate always to be seen by Dr. Griffin at a disadvantage—from the time when he just saved me from murdering papa with the wrong medicine on through various misadventures almost to the present day and I have hated him afresh every time, as if it were all his fault. Some people always see one at her best—he appeared on the scene invariably when one was least desirous of spectators.

I started out with rather a sinking heart not long after the adventure of the poem—which incident, by the way, had rankled not a little in my mind—to hunt up a Sunday school pupil who had dropped off, after an attendance of a Sunday or two upon my class. He was said to live on a small street which I had never heard of, in a remote and not especially genteel part of the city, which I had never explored, and I foresaw that I should get lost. I stopped on my way at the house of another pupil of mine, whom I knew to be ill, and whom I had been visiting for some time.

His mother received me in a cold, stuffy little parlor, and entertained me while Johnnie was being made ready for company. I listened sympathetically to a long narrative of the heartless treatment she had received from her physician, who really did seem to have neglected his poor little patient, and to have been rude and overbearing besides. I had passed him once as I went in, and had noticed how red and bloated his face was, and had thought then that he was drunk. He was a physician, I suppose, of no standing. I had never before heard his name.

"And then," she concluded, "I just 'phoned for Dr. Griffin. My husband said, 'Don't you be bothering Dr. Griffin; he's got more'n he can do 'tending to the rich people.' But he's got time to 'tend to poor people, too, as well I knew. And I 'phoned and he came. An' he's an angel in a sick room!"

The comparison struck me as so ludicrous that a smile arose to my face before I could check it.

"If I was Queen Victoria and Johnnie was the queen's son he couldn't be kinder. Now, you can just walk right in and see how pert Johnnie's bettin'."

After leaving there I walked on, and on, as the story books say, and it really did seem that I had embarked upon one of the vague, nightmareish quests of the Norse tales. The end of my journey seemed always just at hand, and still it lengthened, lengthened, till I could fancy that I was a lovelorn princess looking for the Castle of the Clouds. If Bonaparte Plunket had lived east o' the sun and west o' the moon, or at any other of the addresses given in those veracious histories, he could not, it seemed to me, have been more tantalisingly inaccessible. He took on, at last, a half-mythical character in my mind, as I could find no trace of him.

Hens and chickens ran squawking across my path; geese hissed at me, to my unspeakable discomposure; puddles of ill-smelling water appeared on the mean sidewalks; dirty women and children swarmed about the doors, and still Bonaparte Plunkett's place of residence ever receded from me. I began to have a distinctly disreputable feeling, as if I were becoming assimilated to my squalid environments, and a faint fear arose within me as I realized that I had not the slightest idea in the world of where I was. Yes, I was lost.

I stood still and looked blankly around me, beginning, as the last straw, to feel that my ankle was giving out. I was just making up my mind to ask the way to the nearest car line of the next person whom I should meet, when I saw a buggy coming down the street. A sudden hope took possession of me. He always came when I was in some undignified and ridiculous plight. And—yes!

"Oh, Dr. Griffin!" I called out.

He pulled up at that quavering cry, and looked at me for a moment in the blankest amazement.

"And what are you doing in Rocketts, miss?" he demanded, as he helped me in.

A wild wave of exhilaratin had come over me when I felt myself safe in the vehicle.

"I was only paying some calls," I said in an off-hand way. "Aren't the claims of society burdensome? I am really tired."

"Calls!" he repeated. "And where were you calling in Rocketts?"

"I was going to the Plunketts'," I said. "But never mind—it isn't their day anyway."

I began to repeat my nonsense when he took a little red notebook out of his pocket, and, utterly ignoring my presence, began to look over it with knitted brows. We drove on in perfect silence for several blocks, and he manifested no intention of resuming the conversation at all, while I, on my part, was occupied in regretting that I had totally forgotten that I was "on my dignity," as my old nurse would say.

"Well, Miss Frances," he said suddenly, without looking up, "have you forgiven me?"

"Forgiven you, for what?" I questioningly replied, but a reminiscent wave of mortification swept over me.

He gave a short laugh, still turning the leaves of his book, but did not answer.

As he sat looking down, with his brow furrowed and his rugged face showing every hard line at its hardest in the clear daylight, I stole timid glances at him and wondered how I had ever had the temerity to recite those miserable, sentimental verses of mine to him, of all men! I blushed hotly as I thought of my folly.

The horse had slackened his pace, but the doctor did not seem to notice it.

"Have you been writing any more poetry?" he asked, as if becoming conscious of the claims of civility.

"No," I said stiffly.

He made no pretense of interest in my answer. Indeed, he was quite evidently not at all attending to what I said. "I didn't like that—what's its name?—sonnet of yours," he remarked, flapping the horse with the reins.

"Ah," I said, as if I had not already been crushed by the snubbing which it had received.

"Do you want to know why I didn't like it?" he went on. He put his book down and looked at me with a queer smile.

"Yes," I said, but still with the haughtiness born of inward humiliation.

He took off his hat and looked carefully into the crown, frowning as if he had that moment remembered leaving something of the highest value which seemed to be missing. And then he put it on again. He cleared his throat and jerked at the reins.

"I didn't like to think of your whimpering about some whippersnapper," he said, "when I want you myself."

When the trees and houses had settled back into their normal places and the waterfall had ceased rushing and roaring in my ears I looked at him and saw that he was talking on, but of what he said I had only the vaguest notion. The blankness of my face must have struck him at last, for he stopped abruptly.

"Wait, don't say anything yet," he said.

We were drawing near to my own home, but the horse went very slowly.

"If you could tell me," he began—there was something positively uncanny and awful to me in the humility of his tone—"but don't say anything unless it is 'yes.' Take time—any length of time."

Time! It seemed to me that it had been 1,000 years already. It was such an old, old fact that Dr. Griffin had asked me to marry him that I felt that I had been born with the consciousness of it. I tried to remember how things were before it happened, but no, there was nothing before that.

Neither spoke as he helped me out of the buggy and solemnly walked with me up the long green yard. He paused at the porch.

"If," he said, "you could possibly say 'yes'—don't make me wait."

I ran up the steps without replying, and opened the door, stopping with my hand upon the knob, and looking back at him standing upon the walk below.

"Yes," I said, and, banging the door, I flew upstairs to my own room.

Then I peeped at him through the shutters and I saw that he had bowed his head on his hat for a moment, as if he were in church.

What a ridiculous couple we will be! —Ladies' Home Journal.

A POET'S TREASURES.

Eugene Field's Queer Room and Its Strange Contents.

Before we go upstairs to Eugene Field's room, the one which holds his choicest treasures, it is necessary to remind you again that he has a child's love of grotesque toys and of barbaric colors and effects. He was especially fond of red. The room in which he died is papered with a fantastic, swirling pattern on a red ground, which is absolutely exasperating to those people who prefer soft browns and dull reds. Few persons understand what his idea was in selecting this red paper with its grotesque yet conventional swirl. In Henry B. Fuller's "With the Procession" that author tells about a Chicago woman named Susan Bates, who furnished her whole house magnificently except one little room.

Upon this room she spent a great deal of money, and visited many old-fashioned stores, in order to furnish it like a primitive one she had occupied when a girl in her father's house. Now this was partly Eugene Field's idea in furnishing his own room. He was fond of grotesque effects, he loved red passionately, and he wanted a reminder of the furnishings of a century ago. Where he found that gorgeous red paper, or the old-fashioned calico for the red curtain, would be difficult to tell, but he had a knack for discovering quaint things which other people pass by without notice. When it is added that the rugs on the floor are also red, perhaps it may be imagined that this room is hideous. But it is not. The long bookcase on one side, the white column in the middle around which are arranged shelves holding Mr. Field's treasures, and a gray screen repeating with a slight variation the same singular swirl that is upon the walls relieve the eye to such an extent that the effect is harmonious.

As you enter the room, you are confronted with two hideous figures. An outlandish Japanese figure is suspended from the wall by one arm. In the other it holds three Japanese gongs fastened together so as to make a loud sound when struck with the red stick. The other is the face of a hobgoblin attached to the headboard of his bedstead. Field pretended that he bought it to frighten away his babies when they insisted upon interrupting him while he was writing; but, like their father, they were so fond of the ludicrous that the strange faces the monster would make when certain strings were pulled only made them laugh; so the intended bugaboo but added to the attractions of the room.

On the shelves one may find a strange collection of quaint bottles of every conceivable shape and size, and Mr. Field hunted many shops for those candelabra which our grandmothers loved—those with glass pendants through which a child may distinguish the seven colors of the rainbow. He also had a queer collection of canes, candlesticks and baby shoes. Not alone the first shoes his own babies wore, with the toes and heels worn out, but wooden shoes, and even glass shoes, reminding one of Cinderella's glass slipper. There are also two strange wooden horses, one used by Mr. Toole, the English actor, when he played "The Cricket on the Hearth," and the other, daubed with a few spots of paint, used by Mr. Jefferson in the same play. Neither must one forget Mrs. Hawthorne's ginger-jar, nor the ax Mr. Gladstone gave Eugene Field. The ax is suspended above the window.—St. Nicholas.

No woman really looks as nice with her clothes as the corset advertisements make her look.